

Dear Members of the Human Services Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Paulina Lopez-Chilel and I am a resident of New Haven and I am an immigrant.

I am in support of S.B. 284: AN ACT INCREASING THE AGE FROM EIGHT TO EIGHTEEN YEARS OLD FOR A PERSON ELIGIBLE BY INCOME TO OBTAIN HEALTH CARE REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS. Expanding access to HUSKY to age 18, regardless of immigration status, is an important step in ensuring that our immigrant community has access to the health care we need. But our work doesn't end with expanding access to age 18; we need to open access to HUSKY and healthcare to all immigrants of any age, including parents and adults.

I am a mother of three children. Two of my children were born here in the United States, except for one who was not born in the United States. Not having health insurance makes it impossible to cover all the medical expenses for him, because you have to pay for appointments and medicine. Unfortunately, for children who are not born in the U.S. it is very difficult to take them to the clinic because they send the bill to you and it is difficult to cover the whole bill because sometimes you are making minimum wage and sometimes the bill comes to \$400 or \$300.

Currently, they are charging me for a bill from the dentist. Supposedly, my son had an appointment at the dentist in 2019 and they said that bill is not covered. That conversation made me feel worried because I don't want to have a record that I can't cover a bill that could affect me or my children. Now I am waiting again for them to call me back to see how to cover that expense. There have been times when I have had to choose between paying for medical care or other expenses. Sometimes I would rather not buy enough food for my home in order to pay the bills because I don't want to have a record that I can't afford to pay.

It would change my children's lives to have health insurance. Sometimes they have an emergency and sometimes you have to take them to the emergency room. Since they don't have health insurance, sometimes we don't go to the emergency room quickly for fear of getting a bill. Sometimes you think it is better to find a way to cure it at home or look for natural medicine. It is risky not to be able to take the children to the clinic or the emergency. Sometimes I have canceled an appointment because they told me they couldn't see him because he didn't have health insurance.

My two children who were born here, if they get a high fever or anything else, I take them to the emergency room. When you arrive, you wait 10-15 minutes in the waiting room if you are a citizen. But for children born outside, it can take 6-8 hours.

Also, when I came to the United States I got sick. Because I was afraid that I would not be able to cover the medical expenses, I stayed home. My neighbor told me that I had to go to the hospital, but I said no. I spent a night at home in pain until I could not stand it anymore. I arrived at the hospital and it took them 8 hours to treat me. They realized that my gallbladder was about

to burst. Until you are dying, you don't get treated. First they ask you, what is your insurance and why are you going to the emergency. It is very difficult not to have health insurance in the United States. I got a very big bill, and I had to look for help. Unidad Latina en Acción helped me find out where to go for help. I had to present paycheck stubs, whatever documents were necessary. This process was a little difficult for me because I didn't know the people in New Haven, where to go, or what bus to take.

Also, they sent me to do some tests for my child. I told the doctor that I couldn't go because I didn't have insurance. Little by little I got to know people and I met the social worker Patricia and she helped me in the Free Care process. I had to wait a long time to first apply, then I had to get a denial letter from the state, then I had to take that letter to the social worker. It takes about 5-6 months to get your application approved. In the meantime my son suffered from a heart murmur.

The truth is, for me, it is very important that you support children who were not born in the United States with health insurance. I support SB 284 and ask the committee to support and pass this legislation. Going forward, I ask the committee to work to open access to all immigrants, regardless of age.